

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 3301

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: LUZON MOUNTAIN PROVINCE LEADERS ASK FOR REGIONAL AUTHORITY

REF: A) MANILA 2641, B) MANILA 2442

BEGIN SUMMARY

ACCORDING PRESS REPORT, POLITICIANS IN FOUR NORTHERN
LUZON PROVINCES HAVE PETITIONED PRESIDENT TO ESTABLISH
UNIFIED REGIONAL AUTHORITY STAFFED BY CULTURAL MINORITIES
TO COMBAT STEPPED UP ACTIVITIES BY DISSIDENTS. PROPOSAL
COULD BE SELF-SERVING BID BY OLD POLITICIANS TO REGAIN
WANING AUTHORITY BUT PUBLICATION INDICATES SOME DEGREE
OF OFFICIAL SUPPORT. PRELIMINARY INFORMATION AVAILABLE
TO EMBASSY INDICATES THAT TWO RECENT AMBUSHINGS IN AREA
HAVE BEEN WORK OF NPA (COMMUNISTS) WHO MAY OR MAY NOT
BE MAKING EFFORT TO EXPLOIT UNDERLYING ETHNIC DISCONTENT
WHICH IS A FACT OF LIFE AMONG MOUNTAIN MINORITIES.
FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE REPORTED AS AVAILABLE.
END SUMMARY.

1. ACCORDING MARCH 8 BULLETIN TODAY, LEADERS OF
FOUR NORTHERN LUZON PROVINCES WHICH ARE HOMELAND OF
"IGOROT" HILL TRIBE MINORITIES HAVE PETITIONED
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MARCOS TO FORM NEW REGIONAL AUTHORITY TO COMBAT

"STEPPED UP ACTIVITY OF DISSIDENTS IN THE MOUNTAIN REGION." PROPOSED "REGION XIV" WOULD COVER PRESENT BENGUET, IFUGAO, KALINGA-APAYAO AND MOUNTAIN PROVINCES, WHICH ARE CURRENTLY DIVIDED BETWEEN REGION 1 AND 11. (THERE ARE TOTAL OF TWELVE REGIONS AT PRESENT BUT NUMBER THIRTEEN APPARENTLY CONSIDERED BAD LUCK.) ORGANIZATION WOULD INCLUDE "GOVERNING COUNCIL" OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS AND OTHER OFFICIALS UNDER AUTHORITY OF NATIONAL PLANNING AUTHORITY (NEDA) WITH REGIONAL STAFF COMPOSED OF QUALIFIED MEMBERS OF LOCAL CULTURAL MINORITIES. AS PROPOSED, ORGANIZATION SOUNDS ROUGHLY SIMILAR IN FUNCTION TO NEW "AUTONOMOUS" MINDANAO REGIONAL AUTHORITIES IX AND XII BUT WOULD ALSO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR "PROMOTION AND MAINTENANCE OF PEACE AND ORDER." ACCORDING TO BULLETIN, "IT WAS ALSO SUGGESTED THAT A UNIFIED MILITARY COMMAND UNDER IGOROT OFFICERS AND MEN WOULD BE INSTITUTED IN VIEW OF THE STEPPED UP DISSIDENT ACTIVITY IN THE MOUNTAIN REGION."

2. PETITION WAS SIGNED BY ARRAY OF OLD SOCIETY POLITICIANS INCLUDING GOVERNORS OF THE FOUR PROVINCES PLUS VARIOUS FORMER GOVERNORS, VICE GOVERNORS, MAYORS, CONGRESSMEN AND CONCON DELEGATES, IN ADDITION TO "OTHER" IGOROT LEADERS, BUSINESSMEN AND PROFESSIONALS.

3. ALTHOUGH STORY NOT YET PLAYED BY OTHER PAPERS, FRONT PAGE COVERAGE IN BULLETIN SUGGESTS THAT "PETITION" HAS SOME DEGREE OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT. ON FACE OF IT, PROPOSAL WOULD APPEAR TO BE A SWIPE AT MANUEL ELIZALDE'S PANAMIN ORGANIZATION, WHICH UNDER PRESIDENTIAL DECREE 719 OF MAY 30, 1975 HAS BEEN ASSIGNED PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL NON-MUSLIM TRIBAL AFFAIRS (AND HAS BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN TURMOIL SURROUNDING CHICO RIVER DAM PROJECT IN KALINGA-APAYAO PROVINCE). HOWEVER, WE HAVE AS YET SEEN NO INDICATION THAT ELIZALDE HAS, IN FACT, LOST HIS FAVORED STATUS WITH MARCOS. LIST OF SIGNATORIES SUGGESTS ALTERNATE POSSIBILITY
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THAT OLD-LINE POLITICIANS ARE ATTEMPTING TO PROFIT FROM RECENT DISTURBANCES IN AREA TO CARVE OUT A NEW ROLE FOR THEMSELVES. (THEY ARE PRESUMABLY AWARE OF FAVORS GOP HAS HEAPED ON COOPERATIVE MUSLIMS IN SOUTH AND WOULD NOT BE AVERSE TO SIMILAR TREATMENT.)

4. ASIDE FROM CHICO CONTROVERSY, LUZON HIGHLANDS

HAVE BEEN SCENE OF TWO FATAL AMBUSHINGS IN RECENT MONTH (REFTELS). AS A RESULT OF ONE, ROADS TO BANAUE (IFUGAO) RICE TERRACES WHICH ARE MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTION HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED CLOSED (ALLEGEDLY BECAUSE OF POOR ROAD CONDITIONS). PRE-LIMINARY INFORMATION AVAILABLE INDICATES THAT THESE INCIDENTS WERE WORK OF NPA (COMMUNISTS). IF SO, IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER NPA IS NOW ATTEMPTING TO EXPLOIT ETHNIC GRIEVANCES WHICH EXIST IN LUZON HIGHLANDS AS IN OTHER PHILIPPINE MINORITY AREAS. (EMBASSY AWARE THAT SELF-STYLED "IGOROT NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT" EXISTS BUT APPARENTLY AS NO MORE THAN LETTERHEAD ORGANIZATION WHICH HAS NOT IN PAST BEEN REGARDED SERIOUSLY BY GOP.)

5. EMBASSY MONITORING SITUATION IN NORTHERN PROVINCES TO DETERMINE DEGREE OF NPA INVOLVEMENT AND WHETHER POTENTIAL THREAT EXISTS TO AMCITS IN AREA. FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE REPORTED ON NEW REGIONAL PROPOSAL AS AVAILABLE.
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